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VOLUNTEERS IN MEDICAL MISSIONS

FEBRUARY
2014



WE TRUSTED THAT GOD WOULD GO BEFORE US IN BELIZE



by Brig. General Joe Lax, (Ret.)
Ninety Six, South Carolina

A small team left Atlanta on October 13, 2013, for a medical mission trip to Belize. This would be VIMM's first trip there since 2006. Dr. Edwin Leon, a Church of God missionary who was transferred to Belize in 2012, felt there was a great need, both physically and spiritually, and asked VIMM to send a team.

In order for the team to be allowed to work in Belize it was necessary for the team leader and all of the medical professionals to provide extensive documentation to the Belize government. Additionally, we were required to provide a list of medicines that we planned to bring, along with the quantities and expiration dates. In turn, the Belize government informed us they would provide a large quantity of medicines and would send a pharmacist to help with the team.

Dr. Leon made all the lodging and meal arrangements for our team. His wife, Tirza, who is also a medical doctor, prepared the meals with the help of their son, Eleis.

Each morning after breakfast and devotions at the Leon home we loaded medicines and supplies, then boarded the van and truck that the church provided. After stopping at the hospital to pick up the pharmacist and a day's supply of medicines, we drove to a village to set up our clinic.

Our clinics were held in churches and local government medical clinic sites. Each day the government provided a local medical person to help our team with the registration process of collecting data. The patient then saw the doctor and received



Marley Divver and Melisa Wennerholm
registering patients for the clinic



Dennis Burr comforting an infant



Team members preparing for a
river float

the medications prescribed.

Our team, though small in number, was big in providing for the needs of the Belize people. Each team member worked tirelessly to serve the people and at the same time express their love for those who are less fortunate than we are.

On our last full day we drove to an area where there is a small river running through caves. After arranging for life jackets, tubes, and lights, a guide led the more adventurous of us for a two hour float and cave experience. It was a great opportunity to see some of God's handiwork.

The next morning we left for the airport in Belize City for our return flight back to Atlanta and our homes beyond. At the onset of the trip we were ten individuals who, with few exceptions, did not know each other and were all trusting that God would go before us and prepare the way. When we completed the trip, we returned as a well-coordinated team of ten who had received more than we had given.

Over the years I have been involved in many VIMM trips with lots of different folks, but I can truthfully say I have never had a team such as this one! They came from all parts of the US and all different backgrounds. However, in a matter of hours they formed a team of God's workers who were more concerned with others than themselves.

For a job well done I am pleased to say thank you and God's blessings be upon you - Randy, Sarah, Marly, Glenda, Mary, Nathalie, Erica, Melisa, and Dennis. May we be blessed to travel together again! ✉

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This mission helped me understand

GOD'S WORD Spans Every Language

by Eric Duffield, PA
Haslett, Michigan

My first mission trip was a life-changing experience. Our team of nine traveled to Peru in August 2013 to serve in the Ancon and Ventanilla areas north of Lima. The attitude and the appreciation of the Peruvian people amazed me.

Although it seemed they had little in terms of material ownership, the togetherness, the laughter, and the thankfulness they exhibited reminded me of what is most important in life – belief in God, love for thy neighbor, and realizing the most important thing you




do everyday is share experiences, stories, and friendship with others.

Many friendships were made along the way – with the ninos (children) that shared some jellybeans and peeked into our clinic windows, with the Peruvian sister who shared her house and made gifts for us, and with the translator who hiked with me around Huaraz.

I hope to keep in contact with these new friends, and especially hear more about Pastor Victor's church and his gatherings. His passion for the Lord and his teachings were memorable, even when I wasn't able to translate every word into English.

The mission has helped me understand that God's Word spans every language and covers every location, no matter how distant or different they may seem.

I am thankful to have been part of this team that became like a family to me and to have been able to use the skills I have learned to help those in need. I cannot wait to go again! 



Peru August 2013



Honduras August 2013

THE MISSION THAT CARED FOR HEARTS AND SOULS

by Mary Klaus, LPN
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

The August 2013 trip to central Honduras had a lot of heart and a dual purpose. Five of our team members worked in a hospital evaluating cardiac patients and implanting pacemakers, while the other fifteen team members “gave their hearts” to patients during eight days of clinics.

By the time the mission ended, 41 patients had pacemakers implanted, and 1,030 patients had primary care visits. This included 307 that were evaluated for eyeglasses and 21 who received gynecological exams which included Pap smears.

While the total monetary value of the supplies and services provided was \$2.2 million, the greater value came from the team praying for and with the patients and with each other. The patients in Honduras, the second poorest country in the western hemisphere, are better off because of the VIMM trip.

We departed as a team from Atlanta and flew to Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. After loading our luggage and supplies into waiting vehicles we traveled north to Comayagua. The cardiac team remained here, while the primary care team continued on to San Antonio de La Cuestna.

The cardiac team, headed by Dr. Cynthia Tracy, an electrophysiologist from George Washington University in Washington, DC, got to work almost immediately at the local hospital. They screened, triaged, and evaluated patients with heart conditions such as cardiomyopathies

and conduction disorders caused by chagas, valve dysfunctions, and congenital lesions.

Dr. Tracy called the cardiac mission work “incredibly rewarding, the highlight of my year. We help patients with no options. Many would be dead without the pacemakers. Many are hanging on to life by a thread and just days from dying when we implant pacemakers.”

Meanwhile, nearly an hour to the north of Comayagua, primary care team members rolled up their sleeves, moved into a just completed house, organized medical supplies, and got to work.

We saw patients in a nearby medical clinic for five days, and then traveled in pickup trucks up rocky paths, through streams, and into remote mountain villages for three more days of clinics. We marveled at the rugged mountains and the poor people with rich hearts who live in Honduras.

We did our best to follow high standards of cleanliness in villages where patients live in small adobe structures with mud floors and use primitive outhouses. We set up clinics in small schools where flies buzzed around us and skinny dogs wandered in and out at will.

Our greatest challenge, however, was the language. Fortunately, we had wonderful translators and great nonverbal communication opportunities. Smiles and hugs work in every language.

Along the way we had some fun. Some nights we watched gorgeous sunsets or went star gazing. Other nights, some of us played soccer with the Honduran youth. Our team went swimming on Sunday afternoon, and spent the last day at a beach in La Ceiba with our host sponsors.

At the end of the mission we held a final meeting, reflecting on what the trip meant to us. Like all mission trips, this one seemed to end too soon. It profoundly blessed and changed all of us. After returning to Atlanta, we reluctantly hugged each other goodbye. We left part of our hearts in Honduras, and God willing, we plan to return there next year. ✈



Dr. Rich Fry

The August trip to Honduras was the last one led by Dr. Rich Fry who passed away suddenly on November 25th. In addition to being a very active team leader, Rich was also a board member for many years.

Board Chairman Dr. Lindsey Clarke reflected, “Although his passing represents a tremendous loss to VIMM, we celebrate his life of service to Jesus through medical missions and advocacy for the sanctity of human life.”

MALORY'S

"I Will Forever Remember That Night"

by Malory Eichman, RN
Eyota, Minnesota

STORY

In January 2009 I traveled to the Dominican Republic with a VIMM team as a nursing student. It was winter break of my senior year at Augustana College and I was thrilled at the opportunity to travel abroad for my Leadership in Professional Nursing course. I was raised in a rural Catholic church and had never been on a mission trip before then.

As I got to know other team members I learned many of them shared similar upbringings as I had had and were now on fire for the Lord. The joy of Jesus that each member had was evident, and even contagious.

I watched as other volunteers loved on the Dominican people while they tended to their ailments, held their hands in prayer, and encouraged one another throughout the week. I also saw happiness in the faces of



Malory learned much about happiness from the village children.

people who had absolutely nothing of material value. The children were so joyful as they played baseball with sticks and rocks and caught tarantulas to show us! The people reminded me how life can be filled with joy and happiness without filling it with things.

After a long day visiting remote villages our team gathered for our evening Bible Study and I will forever remember that night. Dr. Hannay, our team leader, spoke of having a personal relationship with Jesus. He paraphrased Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not by your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

It was at this time that something changed in me. I have a heavenly father who loves me and wants my heart! There is nothing I can do or earn on this earth that will save me, but I only have to look to Jesus and trust Him with everything.

I invited Jesus to come into my life to be my Lord and Savior and I have placed my trust in Him. I was recently baptized and I have Dr. Hannay and VIMM to thank for introducing me to the Gospel. To God be the Glory! 🙏



Photo right: Malory celebrated her September 2013 baptism with her Aunt Gloria who has been her spiritual mentor.

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*Whoever is kind to
the poor lends a
hand to the Lord*

Proverbs 19:17



by Larry Secret

from the

DIRECTOR'S DESK

There are few events in the course of one's life that can have as much impact as the passing of a dear friend. For those who have lost a parent or a spouse, the memories surrounding such a loss provoke a heavy heart even after the passing of decades. The reason for this is that God has created us to be relational. There is a desire within us all to relate to those around us and to know that others also care about us. When these relationships are broken, we feel the deep pain of searing loss.

I was reminded of this through the untimely death of our own Dr. Rich Fry who just a few weeks ago passed from this world as he slept. I knew him as a Board member and a team leader and worked with him on projects such as the Village Health Worker outreach in Honduras. He led multiple VIMM teams into the Sudan as well as into Haiti, India, and Honduras; he was known as a physician who cared deeply for others. The news of his unexpected passing immediately brought two things to my mind – the brevity of life and the importance of our relationships.

Our sojourn in this world is described in scripture as “a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). The context of this passage underscores the importance of using our time prudently for the benefit and encouragement of those around us. The difficulty surrounding this endeavor is that we live in a materialistic society that focuses on the bottom line rather than on the development of lasting relationships.

Our materialistic culture often goes unnoticed until we venture out of our familiar surroundings and experience the lack of amenities in the third world – amenities that we have taken for granted. This sentiment is often expressed by our team members as they travel into areas of unusual need; however, it is also noted with surprise by many of those who travel with us that even amongst the neediest there is often a spirit of contentment and even joy.

This leads us to the conclusion that happiness is not as deeply tied to financial considerations as it is to enduring relationships; real indigence can be experienced irrespective of the status of one's material resources. Indeed, the truest and most profound expression of poverty is found in our own broken relationship with God which is then reflected in our inability to relate to the Creator and those around us. Such privation can be best resolved in a saving relationship with Christ. For this reason our teams deal with not just the physical and material concerns of those in need, but also with the importance of reconciliation with God, in Christ.

If we understand that Christ endured a broken relationship with the Father that He might heal our own broken relationship with God, then by His grace we can also more readily endure the passing of a dear friend such as Dr. Fry. The apostle Paul wrote of this transformation in Ephesians 2:15-20 – “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:18-20).

May Our Lord sanctify our grief and heighten our resolve to serve Him with more earnest fervor and passion and may it please Him to use VIMM to this end. ✝

Father and son served together in August 2013

The Honduras Mission Far Exceeded our Expectations!

WHAT WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE TRIP?

My personal highlight was being able to serve everyone as best I could. This trip not only changed me for the better, but strengthened my passion for medicine. I learned more on this trip than I have through years of biology and physiology. The mission trip taught me what we truly need to be happy. The people in the villages do not have internet or cell phones, but find joy in simple things. The mission trip has expanded my horizons to see a whole new world.

Brad



Brad and Steve Gerhardt
Cincinnati, Ohio

There was a highlight every day. My job was to pray with the patients at the conclusion of their visits. Often, while praying, they would begin crying with joy, trembling, or praying together. To say it was life changing is true, but the words do not adequately state the impact. So much good work was done by the doctors, pharmacist, nurses, translators, and students. The Hondurans have changed me — for the better. This trip far, far exceeded my expectations!

Steve

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Newsletter prepared by *Debbie Hennessy*
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VIMM OUTREACH EXTENDS BEYOND MISSION TRIPS

by Jeshni Amblum, Senior Lecturer/Practitioner Faculty of Health & Social Sciences
Kingston University & St. Georges Hospital Medical School
London, England

The 2012 trip to Tanzania had an impact on my life as well as the lives of my friends and relatives. After the trip I shared photos with them and this led to many getting involved in local charity and church projects. One of my sister's friends has started collecting clothing and blankets which they ship to South African townships. Another colleague collects underwear for Somali and Ugandan women. My relatives in South Africa, especially the teenagers and youngsters, have gotten involved in church projects. VIMM has indeed had an impact on many lives. It is amazing how wonderful God is and how His people rise to His call. It has been a wonderful experience for me, and I hope to inspire, and be inspired, as I join future trips.



Team members Jeshni Amblum, NP, and Kenneth Hunziker, MD, pose with a clinic patient on the 2012 Tanzania trip. Jeshni writes, "The patient was a Maasai warrior who came to the clinic complaining of a dry cough. When Dr. Ken asked him to open his shirt to listen to his chest, he noticed the man had large claw marks on his chest. The man said he had been attacked by a lion while looking after his cattle. Interestingly, the wounds to his chest and possible infection weren't his concern. His main complaint was a dry, irritating cough."